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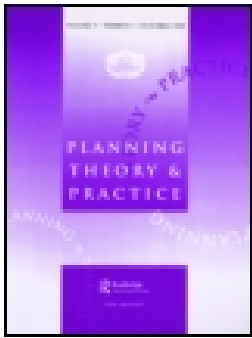
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Tactical Urbanism: Delineating a Critical Praxis

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ABSTRACT

The economic crisis has triggered the popularisation and roll out of various forms of informal urbanism, aimed at influencing the future shape of places as well as the way they are governed. A particular strand within this, sometimes referred to as 'tactical urbanism', has attracted attention due to its potential to inspire progressive place making. However, the hybrid nature of the politics involved has not yet been unpicked. This paper addresses this gap and then uses this analysis to support a critical, materialist praxis informed by actor-network theory. An experimental case study provides a means of reflecting on this approach.

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Introduction

The roll-out of austerity across Western economies, in combination with the fragile nature of economic recovery, is forcing a shift in how development is being approached. As the viability of sites is impacted, developers are facing increased risks and the use of temporary interventions is becoming more appealing as a way of testing out change. At the same time, temporary and low-cost changes are impacting on local governance, with material intervention becoming an increasingly prominent component of consultation and lobbying activities. This shift is not, therefore, confined to the development sector but has broader implications for how collective decisions are made about the future of places and cities more widely. A contention of this paper is that the growth in temporary interventions is opening up a 'battleground' on which different political discourses compete to exploit the opportunities presented by materialist strategies.

A weakened climate for private investment has created opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurs, collectives and community enterprises, with a range of low-capital land uses from urban agriculture to pop-up shops to food trucks all becoming more prevalent. This is evident, for example, in the work of ZUS (Zones Urbaines Sensibles) architects in Rotterdam, who have been working with local stakeholders and creative professionals to bring temporary uses into the Schieblock- a commercially owned office block awaiting redevelopment. A combination of crowdfunding and municipal grants support their work. London's Southbank Centre, an arts and cultural complex which includes the grade 1 listed Royal Festival Hall, boasts a rooftop allotment reminiscent of that on the Schieblock and an illuminated 'power to the people' sign. Shipping containers and semi-permanent street food buildings exploit the cultural capital of a pop-up theme, allowing rental yields to be increased in a heritage-constrained location.

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Newcastle upon Tyne's 'Shindig' dance event, grown from the dilapidated set of buildings which made up the Riverside club in the 1990s, now draws on the warehouse feel of the immaculate 1870s Hoults Yard conversion, populated by hipsters and American-style graffiti enthusiasts. Meanwhile, food trucks and electronic music fill the city's 'boiler shop' warehouse as part of a £200 million area redevelopment scheme.

A common feature of these examples is that they combine state, community and market action. And yet they do so in complex ways that may lead to comprehensive development schemes, or alternatively to serendipitous outcomes. Academics have sometimes offered a dismissive interpretation of the shift to temporary, aligning it neatly with global political tectonics favouring neoliberalism, a dependence on footloose private capital and, ultimately, austerity. There is truth in this polemical narrative, but it is also a partial reading and one which downplays the very real sites of contestation which exist around the growing political prominence of temporary. In contrast, temporary's radical political potential has not escaped the attention of policy makers, who have often sought to mine legitimacy from the traditional association between community mobilisation and temporary use. In the UK this has informed a rhetoric of 'localism' which has offered ad hoc funding for community development as an alleged counterweight to public sector austerity, and within the context of a broader, neoliberal attitude towards the state (Williams, Goodwin, & Cloke, 2014; Featherstone, Ince, Mackinnon, Strauss, & Cumbers, 2012). Meanwhile many of the proponents of temporary schemes have interpreted their actions as oppositional to mainstream neoliberal development processes. This applies, for example, to the work of ZUS architects and to the tactical urbanism movement in the US, as well as to the UK case study which is developed in the latter part of this article. There appears to be a need then, made all the more urgent by the tendency of alternative urbanisms to become appropriated and normalised, for a clearer understanding of the political make-up of temporary's resurgence.

This paper pursues the above problem with the aid of a typology, constructed from a review of literature covering the relationship between temporary interventions and democratic involvement in environmental government. Drawing on actor-network theory, a focus on the identity of actors within temporary initiatives is connected with issues of self-determination to support a political analysis of the democratic potential of temporary intervention. This analysis is intended not only as a potential means of understanding the complexity of temporary interventions but also as a means of guiding praxis. This aspiration is then tested with the aid of an action research case study experimenting with the use of community led environmental change to achieve political influence.

Attending to the Politics of Tactical Urbanism

A small but growing body of literature considers the booming popularity of temporary urban interventions as a tool for changing received attitudes towards spaces and behaviours and promoting longer term change (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Campbell, 2011; Finn, 2014; Haydn & Temel, 2006; Henneberry, 2017; Massive Small, 2016; Sawhney, de Klerk, & Malhotra, 2015; Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014; Tonkiss, 2013). Prominent within this is the work of urban design consultants Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia who, in the years up to 2015, found their work becoming increasingly drawn towards the use of what they term "Tactical Urbanist" techniques. Lydon and Garcia's reports (Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Street Plans Collaborative, 2012a,b) were produced by drawing together urbanists and activists from across the US to share their experiences of guerrilla, pop-up, ad hoc, DIY or open source initiatives and to help establish the salience and accuracy of "Tactical Urbanism" to describe their popularity and potential.¹ Their work attracts particular academic interest because of its emphasis on connecting quick, low cost, creative, unexpected and transformational stage shows with more sustained processes of change to the physical environment involving established actors such as city councils and large developers. In doing so, they emphasise the great potential of DIY approaches to facilitate the government of place change.

Lydon and Garcia establish the distinctiveness of this approach to achieving change by drawing on the Merriam-Webster dictionary definitions of tactical, which are “of or relating to small-scale actions serving a larger purpose” or “adroit in planning or manoeuvring to accomplish a purpose.” (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p. 3). And yet the tactical use of creative forms of protest and publicity has long been associated with community organisers such as Paolo Freire and Saul Alinsky whose actions built on a Gramscian understanding of ideology involving radical confrontation of power structures (Uitermark & Nicholls, 2015). For Alinsky, novel forms of political organisation were, as with Lydon and Garcia, an effective means of subverting liberal framings of democracy. He famously criticised the inertia often associated with such framings, arguing that Liberals:

... sit calmly, dispassionately, studying the issue; judging both sides; they sit and still sit. The Radical does not sit frozen by cold objectivity. He sees injustice and strikes at it with hot passion. He is a man of decision and action. (Alinsky, 1946, p. 28)

Indeed Alinsky is notable by his absence from Lydon and Garcia, despite all authors favouring action over process and permission. For Lydon and Garcia, taking action without permission and asking for forgiveness later offers a means of cutting through bureaucracy, competing interests and official jurisdictions. Their case examples show that, if direct action is engineered effectively and a populist groundswell can be created, it then becomes very difficult for institutions to subsequently refuse to forgive.

The traditional association of direct action tactics with counter-hegemonic practice has prompted suspicion within academic reflections on tactical urbanism, of the migration of this approach to arenas such as urban design consultancy, which lie beyond its radical origins. The loose aims of practitioners, felt in phrases such as “to move our cities forward” (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p. 10) or to help translate “the need for change” (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p. 12) into actual change, are held to indicate a political haziness that is insufficiently appreciative of urban struggles. Associated with this is a fear that the radical potential of tactical urbanism is being lost to more mainstream approaches, which simply consolidate established framings of democracy and associated forms of economic power.

The recent growth of policy interest in behavioural ‘nudges’ is perhaps the most extreme example of this more conformist articulation of tactical urbanism. Unlike Lydon and Garcia’s tactical urbanism, which originates primarily in actors beyond the state, nudges are intended as an additional means by which policy makers or firms might persuade individuals or customers to adopt desired forms of behaviour (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). They are tactical only in the sense that they deploy material and environmental changes to augment control. Thaler and Sunstein’s work on behavioural ‘nudges’ leverages the limitations of seeing individuals as rational, calculative actors in a market place, highlighting how behaviour can be affected by environmental reminders about morally ‘right’ forms of behaviour. Classic examples include the use of smaller plates to encourage individuals to eat less and painted footsteps leading to a litter bin. The proponents of such interventions have termed them “libertarian paternalist” (p. 5) since they defend individuals’ supposed free will while simultaneously persuading and directing some individuals to change their behaviour. The approach rests on assumptions about how individuals will interpret the messages they come into contact with. In other words, they assume a (cultural) knowledge, awareness and a degree of commitment to the systems that nudges seek to improve. But they do not call into play the design of systems themselves or the cultural factors that influence the effectiveness of nudge (Standing, 2011). Thus, while many nudges may arguably do little harm, they do not strengthen the cultural basis needed for addressing environmental problems in a way that is both democratic and firm enough to result in radically altered outcomes.

Nudge approaches tend by their nature to be relatively low key, but critical scholars have also discussed a more visible form of temporary material intervention, used as a means of applying democratic pressure to support capital investment strategies. Mould (2014), for example, argues that tactical urbanism (TU) has become “an apparatus that has captured urban interventionist moments and subsumed

and subordinated them into the Creative City mantra and the urban neoliberal development system more broadly." (p. 537). Others have similarly drawn attention to the mainstream appropriation of meanwhile uses, for example in Berlin they have been positioned as a tool for attracting capital investment to under-used sites (Novy & Colomb, 2013). Such contributions illustrate the potential for tactical urbanism to be redirected towards marshalling support for speculative investment strategies and in that respect it can be portrayed as having been turned to a strategic use in maintaining a neoliberal political economic order rather than a tactical response to it (Mould, 2014; Spataro, 2016). However, a dualistic distinction between order and response or between domination and resistance can also be criticised for failing to appreciate the full complexity of political behaviour within the city and for potentially fostering a reductionist view of change (see Certomà & Notteboom, 2015, for a similar argument in relation to urban gardening).

Rather than a migration from the subaltern to the mainstream, the growing popularity of tactical urbanism might alternatively be read as a diasporic movement through which it comes to be used for a range of political ends. Four tactical urbanist subjectivities can be distilled from the discussion above, and these are outlined in Figure 1. All four subjectivities exploit the opportunities presented by materialist strategies to embark on what might be termed "more-than-verbal" dialogue with immediate social and material networks: a term that will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Each subjectivity is also characterised by a particular history, which sets up moral relationships with remote centres of influence.

The first column of figure one locates Lydon and Garcia's use of tactical urbanism within a critical pluralist tradition, widely associated with the contested (Arnstein, 1969; Marris, 1994) work of Davidoff and Reiner (Davidoff, 1965; Davidoff & Reiner, 1962). Lydon and Garcia argue that TU has more chance of advocating for 'underserved' groups than established planning processes do. They then advocate for a linear approach to urban design which begins by "understanding for whom you are planning and designing" (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p. 173) and then seeking out and empathizing with the views of those less likely to be considered, contrasting these with the institutionalised perspectives of planners and engineers. Their hope is that, by professionalising TU and establishing it as a domain of action, it can be harnessed as a more effective and more sensitive means of transforming urban environments.

The pluralist position, of advocating for the recognition of particular interests within existing institutional frameworks, appears conservative when compared with Alinsky's more revolutionary form of practice, which is based on the understanding that existing structures of service provision in both public and private sectors may well be actively contributing to the position that the "Have-Nots" (Alinsky, 1946) find themselves in (cf. Brenner, 2015). Such an understanding similarly inspired Paolo Freire, who became famous for using temporary interventions, stunts and novel forms of campaigning to achieve wins for the interests of the have-nots, using tactics that did not presuppose the legitimacy of existing structures of government and democracy. Alinsky and Freire relied primarily on the organisation of mutual support within communities, using techniques that extended the Gramscian notion that practical intellectuals might emerge organically to represent different sections of the working class (Gramsci, Hoare, & Nowell-Smith, 2005). They built on the mutualist tradition of anarcho-socialism, as advocated by Proudhon in particular (e.g. Proudhon, 1969), which had dominated the First International during the late Nineteenth Century (Webb, 2015) and would later come to inform the work of radical writers such as Colin Ward (Ward, White, & Wilbert, 2011). It is because of these influences that these more radical approaches are located separately, within the 'anarcho-socialist' tradition in Figure 1.

Despite their differences, more anarchic approaches remain allied with critical pluralist ones in their attempts to stimulate debate about the social and material forces which reproduce the built environment. Individuals become culturally produced citizens with a right to influence these forces, rather

| Critical pluralist | Anarcho-socialist | Neoliberal | Libertarian paternalism (individualistic) |
|---|--|--|--|
| Lydon and Garcia | Freire; Alinsky | Colomb; Honeck | Thaler and Sunstein |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilising TU as a consensus-based tool to solve design problems in the city • Integration of concern for the interests and views of under-served groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tactical use of political stunts and demonstrations in ways that might mobilise objects and the built environment • Creative subversion of liberal modes of decision making • Traditionally addresses obfuscation of working class knowledge by ideology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orchestration of public awareness and interest in peripheral, disinvested or abandoned sites • Popularisation of the merits of development as an attempt at political engineering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to steer individuals' decisions through innovative 'nudges' aimed at triggering non-rational decisions • Determination of key issues to be nudged by those outside the target community |

Figure 1. A spectrum of tactical urban government.

than merely passive or reactive individuals whose behaviour must be changed by others. Neoliberal forms of tactical urbanism lack this kind of democratic commitment but maintain tactical urbanism's essential strategy, of casting out nets of popular support and seeking to exploit the resultant political capital to bypass or redirect established decision-making processes. Of the four tropes, libertarian paternalism appears as the least likely to stimulate local democratic dialogue, something that even neoliberal approaches may be inadvertently capable of.

Tactical Urbanism as a Materialist Politics of Challenge

The typology outlined above demonstrates that tactical urbanism is not inherently challenging to established democratic processes or to conventional neoliberal development processes. However, particular

articulations of tactical urbanism do have the potential to challenge what Chantal Mouffe has termed the “aggregative” and “deliberative” nature of established liberal democratic institutions. Mouffe argues, as part of her call for an agonistic form of pluralism, that this characteristic of established institutions results in the exclusion and delegitimization of other forms of politics within society (Mouffe, 2005, p. 24). Tactical urbanism has the potential to respond to these concerns by opening up alternative political sites within the city as well as alternative methods of political debate which are not dependent on, or even centred around, verbal and textual exchanges. These incorporate what might be termed ‘more-than-verbal’ debates about the future of places: debates that centre on the use of art, objects and other environmental changes to trigger responses, for example from local residents or from politicians. Tactical urbanism, in this conception, sits within a broader turn towards recognising the ‘sociomateriality’ (McFarlane, 2011, p. 734) of praxis and with it, the potential of a widened palette of tools and tactics available to those seeking to influence the future of places. It breaks from traditional planning approaches which have advocated a linear separation of debate from action, instead incorporating action, in the form of experimentation with temporary physical changes and social events, as instrumental within the process of understanding places and their possible futures (cf. Beauregard, 2015).

The actor-network theory tradition offers some useful tools for inquiring into the nature of these more-than-verbal forms of debate. One of the key contributions which can be drawn from this tradition is an insistence that non-human actors can have agency within collective bids to reshape the way societies think and act. Such an understanding has been promoted as part of a wider mission to foster a more distributed understanding of politics within the city (Latour, 1993, 2005) which, to a large extent, chimes with Mouffe’s pluralist position. Actor-network theorists have presented cities as a jumble of socio-material assemblages spanning activities as broad as transport systems, maintenance and repair activities and waste services. All of these are seen as contingent on successive layers of political effort, with non-humans often caught up in bids to enhance the durability of these efforts or to overturn them. This means of attributing political agency to non-humans essentially entails the extension of the human subject to the material realm, as expressed in early work in a search to identify the scripts embedded in technologies (Johnson, 1988; Law & Callon, 1988).

Actor-network theory’s focus on the construction of the non-human subject leads to questions about the kinds of subjects which are promoted by temporary and tactical interventions and the degree of friction between these and surrounding socio-technical systems. Three key questions can be distilled and these are outlined in Figure 2. While a political typology of tactical urbanism inevitably brings with it the danger of reductionism, linked to a narrow focus on ideal types, these questions open up more searching means of inquiry into the nature of contemporary practice. Such debate can in turn be used as a means of guiding critical praxis.

- i) Is tactical urbanism advanced as a means to promote universal, paternalistic notions of acceptable behaviour or situated negotiation of such behaviour?
- ii) Is it supposed to complement existing forms of political representation or radically extend them?
- i) Is it designed to seek the appropriation and institutionalisation of physical change into mainstream systems or to promote the transformation and re-orientation of those systems?

Figure 2. A network positioning of tactical urbanist practice.

Introducing 'Reclaim the Lanes'

Critical forms of tactical urbanism are not only directed towards the weaknesses of established democratic institutions, they also promote change to surrounding socio-technical systems. That in turn requires reflective engagement with issues such as the democratic legitimacy of those systems, how egalitarian they are and how effective they are at addressing community priorities. These issues lay at the centre of a community-led environmental project called Reclaim the Lanes, which was born in the west end of Newcastle upon Tyne in the spring of 2015.

Reclaim the Lanes did not begin as an academic venture. Two residents, one of whom is the author of this paper, successfully responded to a devolved budgeting exercise hosted by one of the Big Lottery's twelve 'Communities Living Sustainably' (CLS) projects. The focus was on one of the worst affected terraced back lanes in the local area, which suffered from strewn waste, overflowing street bins, overflowing domestic bins and frequent fly tipping. These issues were so extreme that they were impacting race relations and threatening neighbourhood destabilisation by influencing some residents, particularly owner-occupiers, to leave. Reclaim the Lanes followed the lead of the local community co-operative in using positive actions, such as street planting and environmental improvements, to mobilise the community where focusing only on problems had been unsuccessful. A partnership was established with a small youth project and around £2500 was received for each of three years. In its second year, the project formed the basis for an ESRC Impact Acceleration Account secondment², which allowed emergent practices to be tested and extrapolated as a basis for local environmental change. This research approach could therefore be described as a 'distended' one (Peck & Theodore, 2012, p. 21) in the sense that it began by observing social environments and proceeded by testing out ways of changing them. These changes pursued a deeper understanding of place, by documenting how various actors responded to the use of new ideas, activities and objects and by combining what was learned with reflection on the political nature of the work itself. The approach essentially drew together both action research and ethnography.

Reclaim the Lanes' connection to CLS and to local environmental services meant that it inevitably became part of local debates about the government of community and place. Governmental systems in west Newcastle can essentially be split into two network formations. One of these is made up of an embedded cluster of "techno-rational" (Cowie, 2017, p. 403) logics and associated, centralised governance practices which inform how decisions are made about day to day local authority service delivery. These have remained remarkably resilient over at least the last four decades. The other is made up of a collection of time-limited funding streams which link more directly to national institutions such as central government and the Big Lottery. These have been advanced as part of a broad political discourse of localism (Featherstone et al., 2012; HM Government, 2010), which has promoted community development as a means of changing behaviours, reducing demand for public services and building the capacity for local management or ownership of services.

The Labour-controlled city council in Newcastle has struggled to mobilise a progressive reaction to central government's localism discourse, despite a stated intention to move away from the first of the network formations outlined above and towards greater accountability. A rhetorical promise to become a 'Co-operative Council' led to some instances of partnership working and contracting out, but no examples of service provision rooted in user influence. This has in large part been the consequence of a strong tradition of universal public sector provision in Newcastle, which has historically been heavily dependent on professional staff to design and orchestrate delivery (Green, 1981; Webb, 2016). Past efforts were made by Socialists within the Labour party to decentralise and de-professionalise control

in favour of mutual forms of organisation (Newcastle Labour Co-ordinating Committee, 1982; Todd, 1981), however these were unsuccessful. Instead, the Local Government Act of 2000 concentrated political control of councils in the hands of a small number of 'senior' councillors, driven by a belief that the private sector required strong leadership. A halving of the local authority's budget between 2010 and 2017 has compounded these pre-existing issues, leading to a particularly extreme level of dependence on the 'aggregative' framings of democracy discussed earlier.

The effects of an over-reliance on aggregative and deliberative forms of local democracy are felt at the level of service design. The need for an aggregated gaze reinforces a bias towards seeing urban problems in the abstract and in the light of particular planes of vision, often statistically based. The construction of analysis in aggregated terms further leads to its separation from implementation and to a need to make the city simple, predictable and knowable (Scott, 1998). Such epistemologies have recently led to the top-down imposition of a redesigned refuse collection system, which met with numerous, unanticipated problems, and to the use of GPS trackers in an attempt to centrally survey and control street sweeping machines and waste collection vehicles. The difficulties with such central control of systems and networks have been extensively discussed (Bowker & Star, 1999; Murdoch & Abram, 2002; Star, 1995). They result in technologies that script an abstracted, idealised and frequently inflexible vision of the end user (compare Žižek, 2017). In Newcastle, they are routinely circumvented by staff, sometimes out of necessity to achieve better service outcomes (see Gasser, 1986 for a comparable account of this) and sometimes due to resentment arising from constricted and inefficient working practices. Local people often experience frustration with poor outcomes over which they have little if any influence.

The allocation of time-limited funding from the CLS programme ensured that a broader discourse of localism found purchase in Newcastle's west end. Though not a new discourse in British politics, the coalition government's localism agenda was born of a need to find commonalities between a commitment to markets on the part of most Conservatives and to social ties on the part of "Red Tories" (Blond, 2010) and Liberal Democrats. The result was a shared commitment to breaking down "public sector monopolies" (HM Government, 2010, p. 3) and promoting active citizenship, whether on the part of individuals or collectives. As a move from universalism towards sectionalism, it reacted to the centralising tendencies of New Labour's previous emphasis on partnerships and networks (Oatley, 2000), seeking instead the externalisation and potentially the privatisation of state functions.

Mutualist overtones within the coalition's localism agenda exploit the traditional association of these themes with the political left, and this is something that could be read as an attempt to fracture the left's coalition between state centrists and mutualists. This tension within the left has previously been highlighted by the English anarchist writer Colin Ward, who contrasts a belief that central control is needed to achieve an equal service for all citizens with what he terms a welfare society based on principles of localism and decentralism and aimed at promoting trust and reciprocity (Ward, 2000). Ward argues, in the same vein as Gramsci's call to develop 'organic intellectuals', that an over-riding, and unattainable, concern for universalism undermines the capability of public services to be responsive to members' interests. Ward also suggests that the privileging of certain characteristics of individuals as the basis for long-distance control and compliance management negates the alternative, of exercising scrutiny and control according to the standing and reputation an individual has as part of a community. Such an analysis suggests that mutualists on the left might find ways to appropriate the localism agenda in support of an alternative and decentred form of anarchist-inspired government. However, it in no way downplays the risks within such an agenda, the most serious of which is that less affluent areas are cut loose from redistributive systems of financial support (Berner & Phillips, 2005; Roy, 2010).

The opportunities presented by localism for a more community-led way of governing local services were also evident within the design of the Big Lottery's CLS programme. This came in spite of its conceptual basis, which was often articulated in highly individualistic terms. The programme aimed to "support people to make greener choices" (Groundwork UK Learning Partnership, 2015, p. 8) by creating generalizable models of "the underlying factors that influence specific behaviours" (Groundwork UK Learning Partnership, 2015, p. 7) and by devising means of persuading individuals to act differently. Such quotes betray a starting point in positivist psychology as a means of conceptualising the work done by CLS. In this respect, it can be allied closely with the outlook that underpins nudge techniques.

Approaches grounded in positivist psychology tend to focus on atomised conceptions of behaviour change, rather than the kind of questions raised in Figure 2, which pursue a more critical understanding of broader socio-technical systems. However, astute local delivery of the CLS project in west Newcastle provided flexibility to stray from this position. Reclaim the Lanes also operated within a broader policy discourse of Localism which was surprisingly nuanced. Central government made a limited amount of match funding available for community organisers and some of these in Newcastle drew explicitly on Freirian influences, seeking ways of mobilising communities of interest around social problems and of pressing decision makers to act. Rationales allied with national funders therefore covered a wider political range than might have been expected from a centre-right coalition government but were still united by their support for action beyond the state, as against municipal leadership.

Positioning Reclaim the Lanes Politically

By mapping and extrapolating the governmental forces in west Newcastle in the manner outlined above, it then becomes possible to speculate how a more community-orientated approach might be taken to addressing local environmental problems by reforming service delivery (cf. Hillier, 2011). Anarchic and co-operative inspirations might feed constructively into a progressive interpretation of localism because they offer a means of simultaneously addressing both centralisation and austerity. They address the 'Realpolitik' (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 6) of the situation. Co-operative council models of public services have, for example, emphasised the need to reconnect with three areas of untapped value: local knowledge, local democratic ownership and localised individual and community action, as a means of addressing the epistemological deficiencies of centralisation (Reed & Usher, 2012). Furthermore, although this vision yields to the imposition of spending cuts in the short term, it does so in a way that prioritises democratically engaged, active citizens and therefore potentially provides the preconditions for longer term democratic mobilisation against the neoliberal austerity drive. Alternative responses to the situation outlined above appear to lead to outcomes that do not address present discursive challenges. For example, making services more customer-driven reinforces marketized logics. Another prospect is the simple collapse of services, in which case responsibilities would default to central government and privatisation would become likely. A logical, albeit linear, prediction of the effect of reinforcing market logics is a deepening of the austerity drive and a consequent worsening of local environmental outcomes in the long term.

Deploying Tactical Urbanism

As an effort to promote a more community-orientated form of local government, Reclaim the Lanes not only needed an answer to each of the three questions in Figure 2 but also a practical means of furthering those answers as a form of praxis. The first problem at hand was therefore how to pursue

the situated negotiation of acceptable behaviour. This in turn required a prior, relational understanding of the forces contributing to various forms of behaviour. This included not only what might be seen as negative behaviour (misuse of bins, littering, fly tipping, etc ...) but also attending to individual and community efforts to deal with broken systems such as overloaded waste bins, missed collections and ineffective enforcement. Significant shortcomings were identified with only using verbal forms of communication as a way of broaching these issues, not least because many of those who came to be involved in Reclaim the Lanes were of Roma ethnicity and had moved from Slovakia in recent years. Few spoke good English and many were wary of engaging with others outside their community. This initially made meetings or design discussions impossible, however it also made it necessary to experiment with new uses of materials, activities and music as a way of developing more-than-verbal forms of dialogue and as a means of building trust. These processes emerged as valuable ways of deepening discussions with the full diversity of the local community.

The pursuit of a more-than-verbal form of dialogue began with observation. Children's use of terraced back lanes as informal play spaces raised the question of whether such a use could be supported through environmental change. This activity also seemed likely to be compatible with organisers' views of what a positive form of activity in the back lane might look like, thus potentially aligning different concerns and starting points. Six scoping sessions were held over the course of one summer, using street party legislation to close the back lane to traffic. These sessions were anchored by emerging bands who had begun to use the youth project. They included street play activities such as basketball and boxing, and young people were given cameras and asked to photograph elements of the lane that they liked and disliked. As well as generating information and cultural insights, these sessions also began to change the atmosphere of the back lane. An initial disbelief among the young people that we would want to hold sessions in a dirty back lane changed to an expectation of using it in this way and in some cases to excited anticipation of upcoming sessions.

At first, the sessions centred on play activities, with the only temporary interventions comprising of wall hangings, which were produced from participatory art exercises during the sessions. Regular review meetings were held at which the three main organisers shared reflections on the response and behavioural signals of those involved and reviewed opportunistic conversations they had had as a means of tailoring future sessions to areas of most interest. Having established a sense that change was possible, the organisers then began to introduce activities into the events that would lead to more permanent alterations to the street. These ranged from litter picks to the provision of planters and a deep clean of the street, to a large mural designed and painted with local young people and a participatory mosaic. A list of some of the activities and physical changes introduced by the project is provided in appendix one and further details are available in the project's accompanying report (Webb & Greening Wingrove, 2017). Figure 3 shows the street and some of the changes which were made.

Some of the material interventions used in Reclaim the Lanes acted as a talking point; they helped to facilitate and deepen discussions with residents of the street. Others were more controversial, such as one session in which young people were encouraged to transform the street using temporary spray paint. These activities triggered reactions from residents more widely about the kind of changes they felt would represent a positive improvement. Their reactions were then used to adapt and tailor further action: they provided a means of opening up discussions about aesthetic likes and dislikes, of debating how and why the local environment was changing and of talking about local service delivery. They also informed the design of further participatory activities such as the painting of walls and gates and small-scale growing activities. A long-term consequence of this work was the building of relationships, and as a result of these the project organisers were able to employ a translator to hold



Figure 3. Activities and street improvements undertaken as part of 'Reclaim the Lanes'. Source: photographs were taken by the author and project works on behalf of CHAT Trust.

in-depth conversations with Slovakian-speaking residents about where they were from, where they were living now and about their views on waste collection and street cleaning systems.

Many of the uses of material interventions in the Reclaim the Lanes sessions were therefore directed at strengthening relationships between project organisers, young people involved in the youth project on a daily or weekly basis, their parents and the residents living along the back lane. They provided a means of triggering opportunistic debates, gathering information, adjusting and adapting activities, co-designing physical changes and maintaining visual momentum between community events. They also helped to probe the limits of community action and regulatory discretion. Much of the information which was gleaned through this process pointed to difficulties with the waste systems on which people relied, including stolen bins and lack of capacity, an inability to report concerns in English and prohibitive pricing for bulky waste collection. This highlighted a genuine lack of understanding about how to use systems, particularly during times when they had broken down. Reclaim the Lanes'

activities initially led to a small improvement in residents' behaviour, held back by poor systems of service provision, lack of repercussions for inappropriate behaviour and the transience of the local population. However, what Reclaim the Lanes did achieve was evidence of widespread support for more enforcement where it could be twinned with service adaptations designed to improve individuals' ability to comply with scripted forms of expected behaviour.

The second and third questions raised in Figure 2 are concerned with efforts to radically extend forms of political representation and pursue the transformation of broader systems. As an extension to traditional, verbal forms of evidence gathering, Reclaim the Lanes did manage to solicit views and incorporate these within a formal report to decision makers. However, organisers found it particularly difficult to move from the critical pluralist position of advocating for local people to the more radical position of generating a shared basis on which to lobby for the transformation of surrounding systems. Some knowledge was gathered about local concerns such as difficulties with claiming benefits and high levels of domestic violence, but these were not obviously compatible with the project's environmental agenda. Efforts were made to create a community advocate role, drawn from the Roma community, with the aim of mobilising that community and as a pre-requisite for building better relations across the local community. However, these are currently threatened by a lack of core costs for the youth project that partnered the work.

Organisers also sought ways to translate Reclaim the Lanes' insights into reforms to wider systems of service provision. This generated a need to communicate this work powerfully to those directly responsible for making decisions about service delivery: to (following Latour, 1987) make project experiences immutable and mobile enough that they could be incorporated within formal aggregative and deliberative decision-making arenas. The participatory ethic of the street improvements, as conveyed through Facebook, as illustrated in the project report and as visualised in prominent artwork, such as a ten metre high phoenix and large mosaic, were intended as a highly visual and political symbol of the possibility of successful co-operative action. One purpose of these installations was to bring the greatest possible amount of pressure to bear on existing, inert systems of decision-making and service design.

The effect of Reclaim the Lanes on external agencies has been difficult to establish. The project inspired a workshop, held in the city centre and attended by over 80 participants from organisations across the region, but no senior politicians attended and no formal response to the project report could be attained. Despite this, a number of unrelated events such as unofficial strikes by council staff and failed attempts to improve efficiency through top-down service changes, resulted in significantly worse outcomes on the ground and prompted Newcastle City Council to announce a Waste Commission. The Reclaim the Lanes report fed readily into that process and positive dialogue has begun between the local community and service providers. This is still immature and remains largely driven by one-size-fits all logics of service design, however, ambitions have been stated to develop such dialogue as a model for future joint working between the local authority and communities. The slowness of change is in part a consequence of inertia within established decision-making cultures but it also reflects the scale of budget cuts being imposed and a perception of community-led innovation as high risk. Efforts to protect failing services from legal challenge also militate against calls to make services transparent and locally accountable. The future for neighbourhood management in west Newcastle therefore looks precarious, with routes to localist forms of service innovation being closed down both by austerity in the local government sector and in the community sector, but there are nevertheless signs of a promising shift towards more collaboration in service design.

Concluding Thoughts

Two sources of inspiration led to the development of this paper. One was a feeling that the complexities of tactical urbanism, including its progressive potential, were not sufficiently well explored in the literature. Another was a desire to know how far it might be possible to use tactical urbanism to experiment with the development of anarchist- and co-operative- inspired ideas. Any attempt to act on this desire immediately brings with it the problem of political demarcation. In a political economic environment dominated by neoliberal economics and austerity there are many reasons to be suspicious of policy makers' real reasons for promoting action beyond the state (Swyngedouw, 2005). Wagenaar and Healey similarly ask "how is the danger of co-option and incorporation (of alternative practice) into conservative or neo-liberal agendas to be avoided?" (2015, p. 559). I have argued for a close attention to political theory as a means of addressing this problem while recognising that there is also a risk of reductionism in seeing planning practice simply as the articulation of a particular political ideology. Theoretical tools are needed that are capable of differentiating the political discourses at play within urban practice and also of questioning the hybridities and points of intersection that inevitably characterise counter-hegemonic approaches.

Drawing on actor-network theory, this paper has advanced a relational exploration of subjectivities within networks of service provision and area-based intervention. Drawing on notions encapsulated by Latour's proclamation of a 'parliament of things' (Latour, 1993), the Reclaim the Lanes project contributes to a discussion recently broached by Marres (2012) about possible strategies for incorporating materialities into dispersed forms of democratic discussion about the city and its futures. This framework brings a new sense to debates about tactical urbanism, challenging its advocates to explicitly recognise the political nature of the identities produced through practice and offering post-structuralism as a possible tool for guiding praxis.

The extent of political hybridity within the English context of localism means that efforts to divine and advance critical forms of praxis are particularly challenging. This paper has nevertheless sought to isolate the potential for a radically political form of tactical urbanist practice, one that is capable of promoting change within a difficult context of budget crises and institutional inertia. In present conditions, such co-operative approaches towards system transformation appear to represent the best prospect for developing a resurgent social basis on which to support public services. However, if such a project is to be pursued, it is also necessary to qualify the cynicism within more reductionist and generalised observations of how tactical urbanism is being used. This paper is offered in the hope of making a small contribution to these goals.

Notes

1. The increased popularity of such techniques was also being recognised by planning website Planetizen, which named tactical urbanism a top planning trend of 2011–12 (Spataro, 2016). See Bishop and Williams (2012) *The Temporary City* for an international review of case examples.
2. The Economic and Social Research Council's Impact Acceleration Accounts provide funding to support knowledge transfer into and out of academic institutions and to promote the impact of academic work. The reclaim the lanes project benefitted from funding which supported a four month, four day a week secondment allowing working practices within the host institution to be conceptualised and developed.

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Notes on Contributor

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